3. Resultados

3.1. Estudio de la prevalencia de neurosifilis en pacientes con infeccion por VIH-1

Nuestro estudio de prevalencia de la neurosifilis en la poblacion de pacientes con infeccion por VIH-1 fue llevado a cabo desde el 1 de Enero de 1991 al 30 de Junio de 1994. Los aspectos demograficos de nuestro poblacion con infeccion por VIH-1 son descritos en la tabla 10.

Cinco paciente adictos a drogas intravenosa tuvieron prueba RPR positivas y TPHA negativas. En estos cinco casos el RPR fueron considerados falsos positivo. Los titulos de RPRP fueron 1:1, 1:2, 1:4 y 1:32. Dos de estos pacientes tuvieron chancros genitales tres a seis anos antes del presente trabajo y recibieron tratamiento para sifilis. Otro dos pacientes recibieron tratamiento para sifilis aunque no hubo antecedentes de lesiones en genitales. El paciente restante nego tener lesiones sospechosa de sifilis en genitales, mucosas o piel.

En un total de 31 pacientes se confirmo el diagnostico de sifilis basado en los resultados de las pruebas serologicas, representando un 3.1% de nuestra poblacion de pacientes con infeccion por VIH. Por sexo y edad, 23 eran hombres con una edad media de 39 anos ± 12; y 8 mujeres con una edad media de 28 anos ± 4. Considerando los factores de riesgos para la infeccion por VIH, 13 pacientes fueron adictos a drogas por via intravenosa, 14 homosexuales y 4 heterosexuales. En ninguno de estos pacientes se habian realizado examen del LCR ni habian recibido tratamiento para neurosifilis. La prueba de RPR fue positiva en 28 de los 31 pacientes con sifilis confirmada. En estos 28 pacientes, la media geometrica de los titulos de RPR fue 1:4,32 (1:1-1:32). El contaje de linfocitos CD4+ fue 487/mm³ + 303. De acuerdo a la clasificacion del CDC para la infeccion por VIH del CDC, 15 pacientes correspondieron al estadio A2, 6 B1, 8 B2, y 2 C3.

Tabla 10. Caracteristicas demograficas de pacientes con infeccion por VIH y resultados de serologia de la sifilis

Total de pacientes	972	
Hombres	741	
Mujeres	231	
Factor de riesgo para la infeccion po	or VIH	
Addiccion por via intravenosa		714
Homosexualidad	77	
Promiscuidad		134
Transfusion de hemoderivados		41
Desconocida		6
Serologia positiva		
TPHA	31	
RPR	36	
RPR falsos positivos		5
-		

La sifilis e infeccion por VIH fueron diagnosticadas simultaneamente en 19 pacientes (Grupo 1). Solamente tres de estos pacientes tenian chancros genitales correspondientes a sifilis primaria. En los restantes pacientes no se conto con los datos clinicos ni de laboratorios que permitieran diferenciar sifilis latente temprana o tardia. Ninguno de los pacientes del grupo 1 habian recibido tratamiento previo para la sifilis. Los titulos de RPR y contaje de los linfocitos CD4+ son descritos en la tabla 11.

En seis de los 31 pacientes con sifilis confirmada, la sifilis fue diagnosticada antes del diagnostico de la infeccion por VIH (Grupo 2). Estos seis pacientes del grupo 2 habian recibidos tratamientos para sifilis. Cuatro de estos seis pacientes habian tenian chancros genitales cuando fueron diagnosticados de sifilis. En los pacientes del grupo 2, la sifilis fue considerada como curada al momento del diagnostico de la infeccion por VIH. Estos seis pacientes recibieron penicilina G benzatinica 2.400.000 unidades IM cada semana tres veces, dos a ocho anos antes. Los titulos de RPR y los contajes de los linfocitos CD4+ son descritos en la tabla 11.

En los restantes seis pacientes, la sifilis fue diagnosticada despues del diagnostico de la infeccion por VIH (Grupo 3). El intervalo de tiempo desde el diagnostico de la infeccion por VIH al de la sifilis fue de 5 meses a 5 anos. Uno de estos pacientes tenia

serologia negativa previa y el diagnostico de sifilis se confirmo durante la investigacion de una cefalea persistente. En los restantes 5 pacientes, el diagnostico de sifilis fue realizado al momento de una primera evaluacion en nuestro centro, habiendose sido diagnosticados previamente en otro centro de infeccion por VIH. Ninguno de estos cinco pacientes contaba presentaron manifestaciones sospechosa de sifilis al momento del diagnostico de la misma. Los titulos de RPR y los contajes de linfocitos CD4+ son descritos en la tabla 11.

Tabla 11. Hallazgos clinicos y de laboratorio de los pacientes con sifilis e infeccion por VIH-1

Hallazgos clinicos y de laboratorio	Grupo 1	G	rupo 2		Grupo 3
Grupo 4	Огиро г		<u> </u>		Отаро 3
Total de pacientes	n = 19	n = 6	n	= 6	n = 4
Sifilis primaria	3				
Sifilis latente 1	6		6	4	
Pacientes aparentemente curados		6			
Titulos de RPR 1:5	5,263 1:3,	363	1:1	3,04	1:23,10
Contaje de linfocitos CD4+/mm ³	530 <u>+</u> 263		313 <u>+</u> 21	14	368 <u>+</u>
288 694 <u>+</u> 354					
<u>Pleocitosis</u>	5 1		1	4	

Grupo 1 = sifilis diagnosticada simultamente con infeccion por VIH / Grupo 2 = sifilis diagnosticada antes de la infeccion por VIH / Grupo 1 = sifilis diagnosticada despues de la infeccion por VIH

Una evaluación completa del LCR fue realizada en 28 de los 31 pacientes. Dos pacientes del grupo 1 y uno del grupo 2 no tuvieron examen del LCR, dos de estos pacientes con sifilis latente del grupo 1 y 2. En dos pacientes con sifilis latente del grupo 1 y dos del grupo 3 fueron diagnosticados de neurosifilis basados en los resultados del estudio del LCR (tabla 12). La prevalencia de la sifilis y neurosifilis en nuestra poblacion con infección por VIH fue del 3.1% y 0.4% respectivamente. La prevalencia de neurosifilis en los pacientes con sifilis sin previo tratamiento fue del 23.5%.

De estos cuatro pacientes con neurosifilis, tres fueron ADVP y uno homosexual. Los datos demograficos, titulos de RPR, hallazgos del LCR y contaje de linfocitos CD4+ son descritos en la tabla 12. Tres de estos pacientes manifestaron cefalea persistente sin ningun otro sintoma de sifilis o neurosifilis. En estos pacientes se descartaron

enfermedades oportunistas basado en los resultados de ADA, antigeno criptococcico, tincion y cultivo para tuberculosis y citologia para neoplasia.

Tabla 12 Hallazgos de LCR en pacientes con neurosifilis

Grupo	Sexo	Titulo de RPR		Titulo de RPR		L	CR		ocitos D4+	Infeccion por HIV
		Initial	Control	Initial	Control	Initial	Control			
1	Hombre	1:32	1:8	1:4	(-)	14	7	B1		
1	Mujer	1:8	(-)	1:8	(-)	55	12	A2		
3	Mujer	1:32	1:4	1:8	(-)	24	16	B1		
3	Mujer	1:32	1:4	1:4		16		A2		

⁼Linfocitos CD4+/mm^{3. ==}Clasificacion de la infecion por VIH segun del CDC (111)

Pleocitosis fue documentada en otros 7 pacientes ademas de los pacientes diagnosticados de neurosifilis. En estos 7 pacientes, la media de leucocitos en LCR fue $11/\text{mm}^3 \pm 6$. Cinco de estos 7 pacientes pertenecian al grupo 1, uno al grupo 2 y el restante al grupo 3. La media del contaje de linfocitos CD4+ fue 528 mm³ \pm 198 y la media geometrica del titulo de RPR fue de 1:2,70, con un rango de 1:1 – 1:32. Estos pacientes fueron seguidos por un tiempo medio de 13.5 meses y ninguno mostro manifestaciones clinica de neurosifilis.

Todos los pacientes con neurosifilis fueron tratados con penicilina G 24.000.000 unidades IV por dia, por un total de 14 dias. Durante el seguimiento, los pacientes con cefalea persistente refirieron desaparicion de las mismas despues del tratamiento. En tres de estos pacientes se confirmo disminucion de la pleocitosis y negativizacion del VDRL uno a dos anos despues del tratamiento. El cuarto paciente se nego a una re-evaluacion del LCR. Ninguno de los cuatro pacientes mostro manifestaciones clinicas de nuerosifilis despues del tratamiento. Todos los pacientes con neurosifilis tuvieron los titulos de RPR mayores de 1:8. No hubo diferencias significativas de los titulos de RPR entre los pacientes con y sin neurosifilis. Sin embargo, los titulos de RPR de los pacientes con neurosifilis fueron significativamente mas altos comparados con los pacientes del grupo 2 y aquellos con pleocitosis p = 0.046 y p = 0.036 respectivamente. Los pacientes con pleocitosis y VDRL negativos tuvieron titulos de RPR mayores que los pacientes sin

pleocitosis p=0.023. No hubo diferencia significativa de la media de los linfocitos CD4+ entre los pacientes con y sin neurosifilis p = 0.05.

3.2. Evaluacion de la eficacia del tratamiento de la sifilis 3.2.a. Evaluacion inicial

Trece pacientes con infeccion por VIH contaron con los criterios de inclusion en el presente estudio, esto es diagnostico de sifilis concomitante o posterior al diagnostico de la infeccion por VIH. Los trece pacientes habian recibido tratamiento para sifilis antes del presente estudio. Cuatro de los pacientes fueron tratados con penicilina G 24.000.000 unidades IV por dia por un total de 14 dias. Tres de estos cuatro pacientes refirieron cefalea persistente y el diagnostico de neurosifilis fue confirmado por la presencia de VDRL positiva en LCR. El cuarto paciente mostro pleocitosis con VDRL negativo. Los restantes 9 pacientes fueron considerados tener sifilis primaria o latente. Ocho de estos 9 pacientes fueron tratados con penicilina benzatinica 7.200.000 de unidades independientemente del estadio de la sifilis y el restante paciente recibio 2.400.000 unidades de penicilina procainica diaria por un total de 10 dias. Las principales caracteristicas clinicas y de laboratorio son descritas en la tabla 13.

Tabla 13. Hallazgos clinicos y de laboratorio de los pacientes durante la evaluación inicial

Pacientes	Estadio de la	RPR	LO	CR	==Infeccion	===Linfocitos
	sifilis				por HIV	CD4+
			⁼WBC	VDRL	A1	650
1	Primaria	1/32	ND	ND	A1	837
2	Primaria	1/16	3	0	A2	315
3	Primaria	1/8	ND	ND	A3	123
4	Primaria	1/16	ND	ND	A1	699
5	Latente	1/16	3	0	A1	480
6	Latente	1/32	1	0	C3	140
7	Latente	1/16	3	0	A1	615
8	Latente	1/32	2	0	A1	500
9	Latente	1/32	2	0	A1	1081
10	Neurosifilis	1/32	14	_	A1	1100
11	Neurosifilis	1/32	24	1/8	A1	1100
12	Neurosifilis	1/8	55	1/8	A2	481
13	Neurosifilis	1/64	16	0	B2	396

WBC/mm³ mm³ = Clasificacion de la infecion por VIH segun del CDC (111) = Linfocitos CD4+/mm³

3.2.b. Deteccion del AND del T pallidum en LCR mediante la PCR

3.2.b.a. Sensibilidad de la PCR

La sensibilidad de nuestra tecnica de PCR fue determinada usando diluciones seriada del ADN cromosomico del *T pallidum*. En base al tamano promedio del cromosoma del *T pallidum*, aproximadamente 0.1 pg o el ADN equivalente de 10 treponemas fueron detectados por nuestra tecnica de amplificacion. Las muestras conteniendo *T pallidum* fueron diluidas en forma seriadas en solucion salina isotonica esteril conteniendo el numero deseado de espiroquetas. A continuacion, se realizo el procesamiento y amplificacion de las muestras en forma similar a la descrita anteriormente. Nuestra tecnica de PCR fue capaz de amplificar a partir de muestras conteniendo 10 microorganismos. Mayoritariamente se observo un producto de PCR de 658 pb por lo que se realizo dot blot no Southern blot (Figura 8)



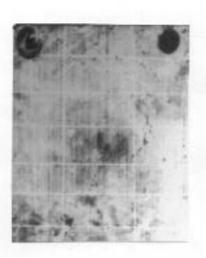


Figura 8. Eletroforesis del AND amplificado con primers 47.1 y 47.2 en gel de agarosa tenido con bromuro de etidium. De izquierda a derecha, Fila 1: Pares de bases estandarizadas. Fila 2 y 3 controles positivos de AND de *T pallidum* (productos aplicados del pPH 47.2). Fila 4 y 5 correspondientes al LCR negativos para AND *del T pallidum*. Fila 6: *T pallidum*, cepas Nichols procesados por el metodo de centrifugacion lenta. Autoradiografia de la hibridacion dot blot de las muestras de LCR procesadas por PCR. En la parte superior, de izquierda a derecha: (1) pPH47.2, (2) no AND y (3) *T pallidum* liofilizado, cepas Nichols. En el medio corresponde a una muestra positiva

3.2.c. Prueba de Infectividad en Conejos (PIC)

En ninguno de los 13 conejos se apreciaron inflamacion testicular ni otros hallazgos que sugiera desarrollo de la enfermedad. Basado en nuestro protocolo, la serologia para sifilis (RPR y TPHA) y las biopsias de testiculos fueron realizadasa los tres meses de seguimiento (Figura 9). La prueba de immunofluorescencia directa con anticuerpos conjugados con *T pallidum* realizadas en las muestras de biopsias fueron negativas en todos los conejos como mostradas en la Tabla 14.



Figura 9. Extirpacion de los testiculos de conejos previamente inoculados con LCR de pacientes con infeccion por VIH y serologia positiva para sifilis.

3.2.d. Seguimiento de los pacientes con infeccion por VIH-1 y sifilis.

Durante el seguimiento, los pacientes permanecieron asintomaticos, incluidos aquellos con diagnostico de neurosifilis. Sin embargo, tres anos despues del tratamiento y un ano despues del examen del LCR, el paciente 2 recibio nuevo tratamiento por una supuesta neurosifilis debido a la presencia de un incremento de los titulos de RPR y pleocitosis. Este paciente era un prostituto homosexual y no practicaba medidas de precaucion para la transmision de enfermedades sexuales. En este paciente los titulos de RPR disminuyeron cuatro veces del valor previo en los siguientes seis meses y el contaje de linfocitos CD4+ disminuyo de 439/mm³ a 134/mm³ durante el ultimo ano. El paciente 3 de las tablas 13 y 14 mostro un incremento de los titulos de RPR cinco anos despues del tratamiento para la sifilis y tres anos despues del examen del LCR para PCR. Este paciente rehuso un nuevo examen del LCR por lo que fue tratado con penicilina benzatinica IM 2.400.000 unidades. Los pacientes 7 y 10 murieron de aspergilosis pulmonar y tuberculosis

pulmonar respectivamente. Los pacientes 4,5,6,8,11,y 12 fueron seguidos por un tiempo medio de 2.8 anos. Los titulos de RPR disminuyeron progresivamente en el paciente 8 y se negativizaron en los restantes pacientes. Desafortunadamente, los pacientes 1, 9, y 13 desaparecieron y el seguimiento no fue posible.

Tabla 14. Hallazgos clinicos y de laboratorio de los pacientes durante la ultima evaluacion

Pacientes	RPR		LCR			==Infeccion	===Linfocitos
						por HIV	CD4+
		⁼WBC	VDRL	PCR	TIC	A1	
1	0	0			ND	A1	410
2	_	3			0	A2	1057
3	0	2			ND	A3	340
4	1/8	3			ND	A1	300
5	1/8	4			0	A1	520
6	_	1			0	C3	298
7	0	3			0	A1	102
8	_	0			0	A1	320
9	1/8	5			0	A1	614
10	1/1	7			_	A1	439
11	_	7			1/8	A1	1020
12	0	4	•		1/8	A2	84
13	0	0			0	B2	30

*WBC/mm³ = mm³ = Clasificacion de la infecion por VIH segun del CDC (111) == Linfocitos CD4+/mm³

4. Discusion

4.1. Estudio de la prevalencia de la neurosifilis en pacientes con infeccion por VIH-1

En el estudio de la sifilis contamos con un gran conocimiento de la patogenia aunque no lo suficiente para explicar ciertos fenomenos relacionados al tropismo y virulencia del *T pallidum* a nivel del CNS. Actualmente, no contamos con los datos suficientes para explicar la precoz invasion del CNS por el *T pallidum* asi como el grado de inmunopatogenicidad que conlleva al desarrollo de la enfermedad o latencia de la enfermedad. Las variaciones de las pruebas treponemicas y no treponemicas durante el diagnostico y posterior al tratamiento reflejarian los mecanismos inmunologicos y peculiar interaccion del *T pallidum*. A pesar de la variable sensibilidad y especificidad de la serologia en el diagnostico, esta permanence como la tecnica diagnostica estandarizada de la sifilis (1,2,5,8,11). Las limitaciones del diagnostico serologico se incrementan en los pacientes con infecciones por VIH debido a las alteraciones inmunologicas propias de la

infeccion por el VIH (5,8,10,11). Estas anormalidades inmunologicas potencialmente afectan los resultados falsos positivos, sensibilidad y especificidad de las serologicas de la sifilis, asi como la evaluacion del tratamiento. En nuestro estudio de la prevalncia de la neurosifilis, encontramos cinco pacientes con RPR falsos positivos representando 0.51% del total de la nuestra poblacion. Muy probablemente dos de estos pacientes tuvieron chancros genitales por lo que no podemos descartar la probabilidad de sifilis. Nuestro estudio demostro una frequencia de la serologia falsa positiva mucho menor que otros trabajos (59, 60, 67, 68). Cabe destacar que todos nuestros pacientes con serologias falsas positivas de la sifilis fueron adictos por via intravenosa. Resultados falsos positivos de la serologias de la sifilis es un hallazgo frecuente en adictos por via intravenosa (68), aunque otros autores no hallaron esta asociacion (67,119). En los casos de serologias falsas positivas, los titulos fueron bajos y transitorios (119) similares a los a las descritas en nuestros pacientes. Dado la baja prevalencia de la serologia falsa positiva en nuestra poblacion de pacientes con infeccion por VIH, nosotros consideramos la serologia RPR como una prueba valida para el screening de la sifilis.

Un total de cuatro estudio de la prevalencia de la sifilis en pacientes con infeccion por VIH-1 fueron realizados en paises occidentales (67-68,119). La prevalencia de la sifilis en estos estudios oscilo 4,9 a 43.9%. Brandon y colaboradores hallaron una prevalencia del 32% en pacientes con infeccion por VIH, mucho de ellos homosexuales (67). Este estudio cuenta con el sesgo de realizarse en una clinica de Enfermedades de Transmision Sexual. En nuestra poblacion de pacientes con infeccion por VIH-1, la prevalencia de la sifilis fue de 3,1% incluyendo aquellos con y sin previo tratamientos para la sifilis. La prevalencia de la sifilis en nuetro estudio fue menor que en otros estudios descritos (67-69,119). La menor prevalencia de sifilis en nuestra poblacion con infeccion podria ser atribuible al menor porcentaje de pacientes homosexuales en nuestra poblacion de pacientes con infeccion por VIH-1. Aunque las precauciones del sexo seguro disminuyen la incidencia de sifilis en homosexuales, la prevalencia de sifilis en nuestra poblacion de pacientes homosexuales fue mayor. Una prevalencia similar de sifilis en homosexuales fue descrita en un trabajo realizado en nuestro pais (119). En vista a la alta prevalencia de la sifilis en los pacientes

con infeccion por VIH-1 y considerando la sifilis como un factor de riesgo para la transmission del VIH, la serologia de la sifilis es recomendada en la poblacion de pacientes con infeccion por VIH y la prueba de VIH en los pacientes con sifilis.

La presencia de *T pallidum* en el LCR fue descrita en todos los estadios de la sifilis (2-4,10,39) independientemente del resultado del la VDRL (10). Ademas, es reconocido que la penicilina G benzatinica no alcanza los niveles bactericidas en LCR (110,39). En seis de nuestros pacientes del grupo dos quienes habian sido tratados con penicilina G benzatinica no desarrollaron neurosifilis. Hallazgos similares fueron descritos en pacientes con sifilis sin infeccion por VIH (1,39). La eficacia de la penicilina jugaria un rol muy importante en la prevencion de la neurosifilis si comparamos los pacientes de nuestro estudio del grupo 2 con aquellos del grupo 3 quienes adquirieron la sifilis concomitantemente o posterior a la infeccion por VIH.

La prevalencia de la neurosifilis en los pacientes con infeccion por VIH es mayor que en los pacientes sin infeccion por VIH (1,2,5). En nuestro estudio, cuatro (23.5%) de nuestros pacientes con sifilis no tratadas fueron diagnositicados de neurosifilis, tres de ellos basados en VDRL positivo en LCR y el cuarto debido a los hallazgos clinicos, serologicos y pleocitosis. En nuestro estudio, ningun paciente presento las manifestaciones clinicas atipicas o floridas de neurosifilis descritas en otros trabajos (1,39,50,53,62,63). Sin embargo, nuestro estudio demostro una mayor prevalencia de neurosifilis que los descritos por Holtom y colaboradores (9.1%) (68) o Brandon y colaboradores (3.9%), (67), lo cual podria ser atribuible a la sistematica realization del examen del LCR en nuestra poblacion de pacientes con infeccion por VIH y sifilis. Esta evidencia sugiere que el examen de LCR debe ser realizado en todos los pacientes con infeccion por VIH y neurosifilis (51,57). En nuestro estudio, todos los pacientes con neurosifilis tuvieron titulos de RPR mayor a 1:8. Basado en estos resultados, la neurosifilis debe ser consideradas en pacientes con altos titulos de RPR.

Las anormalidades inmunologicas ocasionadas por VIH facilitarian la invasion y persistencia del *T pallidum* en CNS (1,4,39). Actualmente, contamos con limitaciones en la valoracion del grado de anormalidades inmunologicas o inmunosupresion en los pacientes con infeccion por VIH. Los datos disponibles indican que no existe correlacion entre la incidencia de neurosifilis y el bajo contaje de CD4+ (45, 57,71). En nuestro trabajo, los pacientes con VDRL positiva en LCR presentaron una media del contaje de linfocitos CD4+ superior a 200 mm³. Otros factores diferentes al bajo contaje de linfocitos CD4+ o inmunosupresion estarian involucrados en la invasion del SNC por el *T pallidum*.

En pacientes sin infeccion por VIH, la presencia de sifilis latente asociada a pleocitosis es evidencia suficiente para el diagnostico presuntivo de neurosifilis (11). Nuestros pacientes con neurosifilis mostraron un contaje de leucocitos en LCR significativamente elevada (p < 0.032), sin embargo, este hallazgo estuvo tambien presente en siete pacientes con VDRL negativo en LCR. La pleocitosis puede ser causada por diferentes etiologies incluyendo el propio VIH. Los pacientes con infeccion por VIH con serologia positiva para sifilis y pleocitosis debe ser considerada como neurosifilis y ser tratadas como tal, como tambien descrita por otros de autores (41, 112). En nuestro estudio, los pacientes con neurosifilis presentaron una negativizacion de VDRL en LCR y disminucion de la pleocitosis. Debido a la baja sensibilidad de la prueba VDRL en LCR (1, 39), no podemos descartar neurosifilis en los pacientes con VDRL negativo en LCR.

4.2. Evaluacion del tratamiento de a sifilis en pacientes con infeccion por VIH

Numerosos autores describieron fracasos del tratamiento estandarizado de la sifilis en pacientes con infeccion por VIH. Johns y colaboradores describieron dos pacientes con sifilis temprana previamente tratada con penicilina benzatinica y que posteriormente desarrollaron neurosifilis (53). Lukerhart y colaboradores confirmaron tres casos de neurosifilis en pacientes con sifilis secundaria previamente tratada con penicilina benzatinica, en dos de estos pacientes del diagnostico de invasion del LCR comprobados unicamente por la prueba de infectividad en conejos (10). Gregory y colaboradores no encontraron neurosifilis en ningun pacientes de su serie, sin embargo describieron la

presentación atipica de sifilis en cinco pacientes, dos de los cuales habian sido tratados con penicilina benzatinica (50). Katz y Berger describieron un supuesto fracaso del tratamiento para la sifilis en cuatro pacientes de una serie de 12 casos con neurosifilis (54). Dos de estos cuatro pacientes fueron tratados con penicilina benzatinica 7.200.000 unidades (54). Berger describio tres casos de neurosifilis, dos de quienes habian recibidos tratamientos estandarizados para sifilis temprana 2 y 38 anos antes (56). De una serie de 46 pacientes hospitalizados con el diagnostico de neurosifilis, Katz y Berger describieron un supuesto fracaso del tratamiento para la sifilis en cuatro pacientes de una serie de 12 casos de neurosifilis (56). Gordon y colaboradores describieron 11 pacientes con neurosifilis sintematica, cinco de ellos habian sido previamente tratados con pencilina benzatinica (57). Posterior al tratamiento con penicilina intravenosas, 1 de los 11 pacientes fue diagnosticado tener neurosifilis considerado como recidiva. En dos de estos pacientes se observo un fracaso del tratamiento debido a la persistencia de los titulos de RPR y VDRL en LCR (57). Finalmente, Malone y colaboradores, describieron la recidiva de sifilis basados en hallazgos clinicos y de serologicos en 10 pacientes de una serie de 61 pacientes durante un seguimiento medio de 14.7 meses (rango 6 – 25) (58). En estos 10 pacientes, dos habian sido tratados con alta dosis de penicilina procainica mas probenecid; altas dosis de penicilina intravenosa en 5 y tres restantes con penicilina benzatinica (sifilis secundaria en dos y neuropatia craneal en un pacientes). En resumen, menos de 40 casos de recidiva de sifilis en pacientes con infeccion por VIH y antecedentes de previo tratamiento tratamiento para la sifilis fueron descritos en la literatura. En muchos de estos pacientes no se describio si la infeccion por VIH precedio o fue posterior al tratamiento de la sifilis. Tambien, muchos de estos pacientes fueron tratados para la sifilis muchos anos antes de la recidiva (50,53,55,56). Durante tal extraordinariamente prolongado periodo de tiempo, no se podria descartar reinfeccion en estos pacientes. Dos de nuestros pacientes mostraron un incremento de los titulos de RPR anos despues de recibir tratamiento para la sifilis, este hallazgo fue considerado reinfeccion mas que recidiba. Muy posiblemente, algunos casos de la literatura considerados como recidiva fueron reinfectados. Mas alla de la probabilidad de reinfeccion, estas supuestas recidivas serologicas podrian ser el resultado de anormalidades inmunologicas secundaria a la infeccion por VIH (59, 60). Nuestros

pacientes mostraron una repuesta serologica al tratamiento con penicilina similar a la que seria esperado en pacientes inmunocompetente como tambien fue descrito en los trabajo de Hutchinson y colaboradores (51) y Gourevitch y colaboradores (45).

Desafortunadamente, en muchos de estos trabajos no se describio los contajes de linfocitos CD4+. Malone y colaboradores describieron un contaje de linfocitos CD4+ promedio mayor a 400/mm³ y no encontraron diferencia estadistica significativa en los contajes de linfocitos CD4+ entre los pacientes con y sin recidiva de sifilis (58). De los restantes trabajos, solamente Berger y colaboradores (55) y Gordon y colaboradores (57) describieron el contaje de linfocitos CD4+ al momento de la recidiva de la sifilis pero no cuando fueron tratados por primera vez. Nuestros pacientes mostraron un contaje de linfocitos CD4+ relativamente estable promedio mayor a 200/mm³. En nuestro estudio, excepto en dos de nuestros pacientes, los restantes pacientes tenian un los contajes de linfocitos CD4+ mayor a mayor a 200/mm³ cuando recibieron el primer tratamiento para sifilis. Presumiblemente, la repuesta al tratamiento de la sifilis en nuestro pacientes fue influenciada por una leve inmunosupresion. Una repuesta favorable al tratamiento para la sifilis en pacientes con infeccion por VIH fueron tambien descritos en la literatura (45,51) en pacientes con contaje de los linfocitos CD4+ similar a la de nuestro pacientes (45,51). Un contaje de linfocitos CD4+ menor a 200/mm³ fueron descritos en unos pocos pacientes de estas series, 4 de 52 pacientes por Hutchinson y colaboradores (51) y 6 de 24 casos evaluados por Gourevitch y colaboradores (45).

4.2.a. Evaluacion de la PCR en la deteccion del ADN del *T pallidum* en LCR de pacientes con infeccion por VIH

Previos trabajos evaluaron el tratamiento de la sifilis sin realizar el examen del LCR (51, 64), o realizaron un examen del LCR limitado al contaje de leucocitos y VDRL (70). Para superar estas dificultades, nosotros realizamos una evaluacion sistematica del LCR por tres diferentes metodos, VDRL, PCR para *T pallidum* y la prueba de infectividad en conejos. En teoria, la PCR seria una tecnica eficaz para detectar el ADN del *T pallidum* en LCR. Sin embargo, los resultados de la PCR en el diagnostico de la neurosifilis fueron

controvertidos. Por otro lado, la PCR fue muy efectiva en el diagnostico de la neurosifilis congenita mostrando una gran correlacion con el prueba de infectividad en conejos (110). Gordon y colaboradores (357) y Noordhoek y colaboradores (109) describieron una baja sensibilidad, así como casos con resultados de VDRL en LCR positivos y PCR negativos. En nuestro trabajo, los resultados de PCR negativo se correlacionaron con los resultados de VDRL en LCR. Noordhoek y colaboradores (109) describieron resultados de PCR negativos en casos de sifilis no tratados que se positivizaron despues del tratamiento. Estoz hallazgos no estuvieron presentes en nuestro trabajo. Mas estudios de la PCR en la evaluacion de la presencia del *T pallidum* en LCR son necesario para evaluar su utilidad en el diagnostico y evaluacion del tratamiento de la sifilis.

4.2.b. Evaluacion del Prueba de Infectividad en Conejos

La prueba de infectividad en conejos es considerada como la prueba de referencia para el diagnostico de la neurosifilis (8). Similar a otros investigadores, nosotros usamos muestras de LCR congeladas (70). Los resultados de la prueba de infectividad en conejos en nuestro trabajo fueron negativos y se correlacionaron con los hallazgos clinicos, resultados serologicos y PCR presentes en todos nuestros pacientes.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Prevalencia de la neurosifilis en los pacientes con infeccion por VIH

- i) En nuestra poblacion de pacientes con infeccion por VIH, la prevalencia de la sifilis fue de 3.1%. Un 45.1% de los pacientes con sifilis fueron homosexuales.
- ii) La prevalencia de neurosifilis fue de 0.4% en el total de nuestros pacientes con serologia positiva para sifilis, y de 23.5% en los pacientes sin previo tratamiento para la sifilis. Ningun paciente presento manifestaciones neurologicas otra que cefalea. Los titulos de RPR fueron mayores en los pacientes con neurosifilis (0.046), No hubo diferencias significativas del contaje de los linfocitos CD4+ entre los pacientes con y sin neurosifilis.
- iii) La significativa prevalencia de neurosifilis asintomatica sugiere la necesidad de realizar evaluacion del LCR en todos los pacientes con infeccion por VIH-1 y sifilis independientemente del estadio de la sifilis.

5.2. Evaluacion del tratamiento de la sifilis mediante la PCR y la prueba de infectividad en conejos

- Todos nuestros pacientes tuvieron una repuesta favorable al tratamiento con penicilina. La minima inmunodepresion en nuestros pacientes con infeccion por VIH-1 podria haber influenciado la repuesta al tratamiento.
- v) En nuestra experiencia, la PCR mostro ser una tecnica efectiva en la valoracion del tratamiento de la sifilis en pacientes con infeccion por VIH-1. Los resultados de la PCR se correlacionaron con aquellos de la VDRL en LCR y la prueba de infectividad en conejos.
- vi) Otros factores diferentes a la eficacia de la penicilina podrian explicar los casos de recidiva de neurosifilis descritos en la literatura.

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7. Actividades y trabajos originados a partir del estudio de neurosífilis en pacientes con infección por VIH

7.1.a. Beca FIS: Expediente 94/1315

Título: Valoración de la PCR en el diagnóstico y tratamiento de la neurolues en pacientes con infección por VIH

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- 1. Bordón JM, Martínez Vázquez C, Alvarez M et al. Neurosyphilis and HIV-infected patients. Europ J Microbiol & Infect Dis. 1995; 14: 864-9
- 2. Bordón JM, Martínez-Vázquez C, de la Fuente Aguado J, Sopeña B, Ocampo-Hermida A, Núñez-Torrón J, Rodríguez-Sousa T, Alvarez-Fernández M, del Blanco T. Response to standard syphilis treatment in HIV-infected patients. Europ J Microbiol & Infect Dis. 1999; 18: 729-31
- 3. Mc Lean S and Bordón J. False positive rapid plasma reagin tests and anticardiolipine antibodies. JID 1995; 172: 905

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- 1. Bordón JM, Martínez-Vázquez C, de la Fuente Aguado J, Sopeña Pérez Argüelles B, Ocampo A. Prevalencia de la neurosífilis en pacientes con infección por VIH. Tercer Congreso Español de SIDA. Marzo 7-10 1995. La Comuna.
- 2. Bordón JM, Martínez-Vázquez C, Rodríguez-Sousa T, de la Fuente Aguado J, J, Sopeña Pérez Argüelles B, Ocampo-Hermida A, Núñez-Torrón J. Evaluación de la respuesta al tratamiento mediante la detección de DNA de T pallidum en LR por la reacción de la cadena de polimerasa. Tercer Congreso Español de SIDA. Marzo 7-10 1995. La Comuna.

7.1.d. Revisor de Trabajos Originales

Revista Médica Científica. EJEP. Dordrecht, The Nederlands

Artículo: Assessment of prevalence of late active syphilis based on routine VDRL and TPHA results. Junio 1997.

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8. Anexo 1

Neurosyphilis in HIV-Infected Patients

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To determine the prevalence and the clinical and serological findings of neurosyphilis in HIV-infected patients, Treponema pallidum hemagglutination (TPHA) tests, CD4+ lymphocyte counts and determination of rapid plasma reagin (RPR) titers were performed in 972 HIV-infected patients over a period of 3.5 years. Patients were scored according to the Centers for Disease Control's classification for HIV infection. Reactive serum syphilis tests and positive cerebrospinal fluid (CSF)-Venereal Disease Research Laboratory (VDRL) tests, with or without clinical symptoms, were used as the criteria for diagnosis of neurosyphilis. The TPHA test was positive in 31 patients, representing 3.1 % of all HIVinfected patients included in the study. Of these, 13 were intravenous drug addicts, 14 were homosexuals and 4 were heterosexuals. Diagnosis of syphilis was concurrent with HIV infection in 19 patients, prior to HIV infection in 6 patients and after HIV infection in 6 patients. CSF examinations were performed in 28 of the 31 (90.3 %) patients with serologically evident syphilis. Four patients had positive CSF-VDRL tests with pleocytosis (23.5 % of untreated syphilis patients in whom CSF was examined), three of whom reported mild headache, which was considered a doubtful manifestation of neurosyphilis. Patients with syphilis diagnosed and treated prior to diagnosis of HIV infection did not have evidence of neurosyphilis. Seven patients had pleocytosis with a negative CSF-VDRL test, without any clinical manifestations of neurosyphilis. There was no significant difference in the mean CD4+ lymphocyte count between patients with and without neurosyphilis (p = 0.5). RPR titers in neurosyphilis patients were greater than those in patients previously treated for syphilis and in those with pleocytosis only (p = 0.046 and 0.036, respectively). All neurosyphilis patients had an RPR titer > 1:8. After therapy, neurosyphilis patients had negative CSF-VDRL tests with a lower level of pleocytosis. The prevalence of neurosyphilis was 0.4 % in HIV-infected patients and 23.5 % in HIVinfected patients with untreated syphilis. This high prevalence of neurosyphilis warrants CSF examination in HIV-infected patients with syphilis, regardless of the stage of syhilis.

An increasing incidence of syphilis has been reported in western countries in recent years (1, 2). It has been reported that intravenous drug addicts have now become the group of HIV-infected patients most affected by syphilis (1, 3). Intravenous drug addicts constitute the largest group of patients within the HIV-infected population in Spain (4), and thus it is expected that the intravenous drug-addicted patients in our country will be simultaneously affected by syphilis and HIV infection. In patients with both HIV infection and syphilis, there have been several reports of seroreversion without specific therapy (5), atypical clinical presentation (6) and aggressive rapid

progression and failure to respond to recommended forms of syphilis therapy (1, 4, 5, 7). Therefore, today it is necessary to reevaluate syphilis in HIV-infected patients, given that immunological abnormalities caused by HIV infection recall situations such as those observed during the prepenicillin era (5).

The aim of this study was to evaluate the prevalence of neurosyphilis in HIV-infected patients and to compare serological and clinical syphilis findings according to whether syphilis was diagnosed before or after infection with HIV.

Patients and Methods

Patients. All adult patients with HIV infection confirmed by both enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay and West-

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em blot testing were included in the study, regardless of their risk for HIV infection or the evolving stages of HIV infection and synthilis. All the patients were asked about previous sexually transmitted discuses and syphilis tests. All were tested for syphilis by the serum rapid plasma reagin (RPR) test, the Treponema pellidum bemagginination (TPNA) test and CD4+ lymphocyte counts. Patients were secred according to the Carriers for Disease Control's (CDC) classification for HIV insection at the beginning of the study (8). All the potients with positive scredepical freponemic tests were offered a cerebruspianl fluid (CSF) examination for glucose, protein and leukocytes, a Veneroal Disease Research Laboratory (VDRL) test and a TPHA test. Prior to the CSF examination and considering clinical and scrological syphilis findings, all patients were classified into different syphilis stages. After CSF ourmination all patients were treated according to the CDC recommendation for syphilis thorapy (5). Those with a nonreactive CSF-VDRL test and placeyoosis were trented as neurosyphilis patients. The criterio for diagnosis of neurosyphilis were a reactive serum troponomic test, a reactive CSF-VDRL test and a positive CSF-TPHA test with or without clinical manifestations of neurosyphilis. Pleocycosis was defined as > 5 leukocytes/non³ CSF, CSF samples with > 5 arythrocytes from "were not arctituded to avoid false-positive CSF-VDRL reactions. All CSF samples underwest a cytology study, staining for acid-fast bacill, and cryptococcal antigen testing. In addition, routine cultures for bacteria, my-cobacteria and fungi were performed. Patients diagnosed with accessyphilis were monitored by means of clinical examinations and periodic portreponemic and trepo-nemic tests of blood and CSF samples.

Sering. The study was carried out in a large, university offiliated hisspital, which is a referral emiter for a population of \$00,000 inhabitants and includes an infectious discusse unit.

Suristical Asalysis. The basic population consisted of patients having both serologically evident syphilis and BHV infection. Patients in whom syphilis and BHV infection were diagnosed simultaneously formed group 1; patients in whom syphilis was diagnosed after the diagnosis of BHV infection formed group 2; and patients in whom syphilis was diagnosed after the diagnosis of BHV infection formed group 2; and patients in whom syphilis was diagnosed after the diagnosis of BHV infection formed group 2; and patients in whom syphilis was diagnosed after the diagnosis of BHV infection formed group 3. Patients from groups 1. 2 and 3 with > 5 leukocytes/mm³ CSP and negative CSP-VDRL tests were duplicated to form at independent group. The following variables were examined CD4-lymphocytes, RPR, TPHA, CSP teukocytes, CSP proteins, CSF glucose and CSF-VDRL values, Statistical analyses were performed with SPSSPC V3 (SPSS Inc., USA). The Krunkal-Wallis method was used to mole comparisons between all groups, Significance values presented were obtained using the SPSSPC programma's Krunkal-Wallis technique, P < 0.05 was considered significant.

Results

A total of 972 HIV-infected patients, 741 males and 231 females, attending our center over 3.5 years from January 1991 to June 1994 were studied. Included were 714 intravenous drug addiets, 77 homosexuals or bisexuals, 134 heterosexuals, 41 previous blood transfusion recipients and 6 individuals with an unknown risk factor for HIV infection.

Five intravenous drug addicts had positive RPR tests but negative TPHA tests and were considered to have false-positive reactions for syphilis; their titers were 1.2, 1.2, 1.4, 1.32 and 1.1. Two of these patients reported supposed genital chancre and treatment for syphilis three and six years previously. Two other patients had received previous syphilis therapy, although they had no skin lesions or earlier syphilis therapy. All of them had a negative RPR test in the next few months.

Thirty-one patients were considered as true positive for syphilis due to their reactive TPHA test, representing 3.1 % of our HIV-infected population. None of them had received previous neurosyphilis therapy or CSF examination. Twenty-eight of the true-positive patients tested had reactive RPR tests, with geometric mean titers of 1:4:32, ranging from 1:1 to 1:32. Thirteen were intravenous drug addicts, 14 were homosexuals and 4 (3 men and 1 woman) were heterosexuals. There were 23 men (mean age 39 ± 12 years) and 8 women (mean age 28 ± 4 years) (7 intravenous drug addicts and I heterosexual) included. The mean CD4+ lymphocyte count was 487/mm3 ± 303. According to the CDC classification for HIV infection, 15, 6, 8 and 2 patients corresponded to stages A2, B1, B2 and C3, respectively.

Nineteen patients were diagnosed as having concurrent syphilis and HIV infection (group 1) (Table 1). Three of them had genital chancre and the rest were considered to have latent syphilis, although it was impossible to differentiate between early or late latent syphilis. None of the patients in group 1 had received previous syphilis therapy. The mean CD4+ lymphocyte count of those not having a reactive CSF-VDRL test was 530/mm² ± 289. One of the patients with genital chancre had a negative RPR test. In the remaining patients the geometric RPR mean titer was 1:4.21, ranging from 1:1 to 1:32.

In 6 of the 31 patients with syphilis, the syphilis was contracted before HIV infection was diagnosed, and all 6 had received previous syphilis therapy (group 2) (Table 1). Four of them had had genital chance. The syphilis was considered cured in all of them at the time HIV infection was diagnosed. In all of these patients, syphilis ther-

7.

apy consisted of i.m. penicillin G benzathine 2.4 x 106 U, once weekly at least three times during the previous two to eight years. The four positive RPR titers were 1:4, 1:4, 1:4 and 1:2. The geometric mean titer was 1:3.363. The mean CD4+lymphocyte count was 313/mm3 ± 214, with individual values of 457, 28, 380, 624, 191 and 199/mm³

In six patients syphilis was diagnosed after HIV infection was diagnosed (group 3) (Table 1). The time from HIV infection diagnosis to syphilis diagnosis ranged from live months to five years. One patient in whom an earlier serological test for syphilis was negative reported headache, and new tests for syphilis were found to be positive. Syphilis tests for the remaining five patients in group 3 were carried out when the patients attended our center for the first time, even though elinical manifestations of syphilis were absent. The geometric mean RPR titer was 1:13.04, positive individual values being 1:32, 1:32, 1:32, 1:1. 1:32 and 1:4. The mean CD4+ lymphocyte count was 386/mm³ ± 288, with individual values being 895, 448, 532, 319, 60 and 62/mm3

CSF examination was performed in all patients except two in group 1 and one in group 2 who refused the CSF examination. Two patients in group I and two in group 3 but none in group 2

who had been considered to have latent syphilis were diagnosed with neurosyphilis, based on positive CSF-VDRL tests. Three of them were intravenous drug addicts and the other was a homosexual. The CSF findings and CD4+ lymphocyte counts are shown in Table 2. Two patients in group I and another in group 3 reported continuous, mild headache but no other clinical manifestations of neurosyphilis. Adenosine deaminase activity, cryptococcal antigen testing, staining for acid-fast bacilli and cultures for Mycobacterium tuberculosis and Cryptococcus neoformans were negative. The seric RPR titers were 1:8 in one patient and 1:32 in the others. According to the CDC classification, two patients corresponded to group A1 and two to group B1. Besides our neurosyphilis patients, seven syphilis patients had pleocytosis, with a mean leukecyte count of 11/mm3 ± 6. Five belonged to group I, one to group 2 and one to group 3. The mean CD4+ lymphocyte count in these patients was 528 ± 198, and the geometric mean RPR titer was 1:2.70, with titers ranging from 1:1 to 1:32. Syphilis patients were followed-up for a mean time of 13.5 months; none showed any clinical manifestations of neuzosyphilis.

All patients with neurosyphilis received i.v. penicillin G 24 x 106 U per day for 14 days as recom-

Table 1: Clinical and laboratory findings in 31 patients with syphilis and HIV infection.

Clinical and laboratory findings.	Grosp 1 st (0.1119)	Group 3 th (n = 6)	Group 95 (n = 8)	Neurosyphilis petiests (n = 4)
No. with primary syphilis No. with latent syphilis	3 16		6	4
No. apparently cured Maprigeo metric RPR stor Mean CD4+ cells*mm ² ± SD No. with plancy/pain	1:5:263 530±289 5	1 3 363 313 ± 214	1:13.04 396±268 1	1 23.10 694 ± 354

Syphilis gorgument with MV integlia

Table 2: Cerebiospinal fluid findings and other features of four patients diagnosed with neurosyphilis.

Group an	Sex (n)	RPI	Rittor	CSF-VI	OFR 1661	CSFIeuk	seyte s/mm²	CD4+	CDCHIV
NO.		Initial	Gontrol	Intial	Control	Intel	Control	- December	Catalicason
1 2 3 5	Male(1) Female(1) Female(1) Female*(1)	1.92 1.8 1.32 1.92	1:8 (-) 1:4	1:4 1:8 1:8 1:8	11	1.4 55 24 16	7 12 16	1,081 481 895 919	B1 A2 B1 A2

Refused CSF control after therapy RPPs rapid plasma reagin.

[&]quot;Byphilis acquired before HIV infection, "Syphilis acquired after HIV infection, RPR: rapid plasme reagn.

mended (5), which resulted in an apparent improvement of headache. The CSF examination showed a negative VDRL test, persistent but lower pleocytosis and nonreactive or lower RPR titers in the three neurosyphiles patients exantined one and two years after therapy, while the fourth neurosyphilis patient refused a later CSF exam (Table 2). None of the four neurosyphilis patients showed any clinical or neurological manifestations after treatment. All patients with neurosyphilis had RPR titers of > 1:8. There was no significant difference in the RPR titers of patients with versus those without neurosyphilis (p=0.066). However, RPR titers of neurosyphilis patients differed from those of group 2 and patients with pleocytosis (p = 0.046 and 0.036, respectively). The patients with pleocytosis and negative VDRL tests had greater serum RPR titers than those of patients without pleorytosis (p = 0.023). There was no significant difference in the mean CD4+ lymphocyte count of patients with versus those without neurosyphilis (p = 0.5).

Discussion

Despite an increasing incidence of syphilis in recent decades, there have been few advances in diagnosis of this disease. Serology remains the main means of diagnosing syphilis (1, 5), but the serologic tests available are of limited value. Furthermore, concomitant HIV infection hampers the diagnosis and management of syphilis (5, 9, 10).

We found five patients (0.51 %) with positive RPR titers and negative TPHA tests. Very probably, two of them had had a previous genital chancre, yet we were unable to confirm or exclude syphilis in these patients. We found a lower percentage of biologic false-positive RFR titers compared to that reported in other studies (11, 12). All of our patients with biologic false-positive RPR tests were drug addicts. The biologic falsepositive serum reagin tests have been traditionally associated with intravenous drug-addicted patients (12); however, other authors have not found such associations (11, 13). Likewise, biologic false-positive RPR was generally found in low and transient titers, such as those seen in our partients (13). Given the low rate of false-positive RPR tests in HIV-infected patients with syphilis, we consider the RPR test a useful serological screening test for syphilis.

We found only four studies of syphilis in HIVinfected populations, all carried out in western countries since the HIV pandemic began. Prevalences of syphilis ranged from 4.9 % to 43.9 % (12, 14-16). Brandon et al. (14) found a prevalence of 32 % in HIV-infected patients, most of whom were homosexuals. This prevalence data is biased, since it was obtained from a sexually transmitted disease clinic. We found a lower prevalence of syphilis in HIV-infected patients (3.1 %). with or without previous syphilis therapy, than others (13-16). Our low prevalence of syphitis in HIV-infected patients might be attributable to the small percentage of homosexuals in our HIVinfected population. Although "safe sex" measures have decreased the incidence of syphilis in homosexual patients since the HIV pandemic began (17), the incidence of syphilis in our HIVinfected homosexuals was higher because more than 50 % of our study population was homosexual. This finding was also reported in another study performed in Spain (13) and could be related to the lack of information and preventive measures available to our homosexual patients. In view of the high prevalence of syphilis in HIVinfected patients and considering syphilis as an additional risk factor for HIV transmission, it is highly recommended that serological tests for syphilis be performed in the HIV-infected population and HIV tests in the syphilis-infected population.

The presence of Treponema pallidum in the central nervous system has been described in all stages of syphilis (5, 9), independent of CSF-VDRL reactivity (9). It is furthermore recognized that penicillin G benzathine does not reach bactericidal levels in the CSF < 0.1 µg/ml (5, 18), Nonetheless, of the six patients in group 2 who had been treated with penicillin G benzathine, none developed neurosyphilis. A similar finding was also reported in HIV-negative patients with syphilis (1, 5). In addition, the efficacy of penicillin G benzathine in our group 2 patients differentiates them from patients who acquired syphilis concurrently or after HIV infection, in whom syphilis therapy with either penicillin G benzathine or i.v. O penicillin failed (19).

The prevalence of neurosyphilis in HIV-infected patients with syphilis was found to be greater than that found in non-HIV-infected patients with syphilis (5, 6, 16). In our study, four (23.5 %) of the untreated syphilis patients examined had neurosyphilis by positive CSF-VDRL tests, and three of them had mild headache as a doubtful clinical manifestation of neurosyphilis. The limited neurological clinical manifestations of neurosyphilis in our patients are in contrast to findings described by others (15, 18). The prevalence of

Intent neurosyphilis was higher in our study than that found in other neurosyphilis prevalence studies, such as those carried out by Holtom et al. (9.1 %) (15) and Brandon et al. (3.1 %) (14), but this might be attributable to our performing a CSF examination in 90.3 % of our syphilis patients. Therefore, in an HIV-infected patient with scrologically evident syphilis but without apparent symptoms, diagnostic testing for neurosyphilis, including a CSF examination, is recommended. Higher RPR titers in HIV-infected patients with neurosyphilis have also been reported (7, 15, 20). In our study all patients with neurosyphilis had RPR titers of > 1:8. Consequently, neurosyphilis should be suspected in any patient with high RPR titers.

HIV infection decreases the immune response to syphilis, allowing the persistence of Treponema pullidum in the CNS (5) even in the presence of a nonreactive CSF-VDRL test (9). Furthermore, an absence of correlation between the incidence of neurosyphilis and low CD4+ lymphocyte counts was also reported (15, 19). We found a substantially preserved CD4+ lymphocyte count in patients with reactive CSF-VDRL tests, thus, in our patients with reactive CSF-VDRL tests, other unknown factors must be involved in the invasion of the central nervous system by Treponema patients.

HIV-negative patients with pleocytosis and scrologically evident latent syphilis are assumed to have neurosyphilis (5). Our patients with neurosyphilis showed significantly high levels of leukocytes in the CSF (p < 0.032), but this nonspecific finding was present in seven patients with negative CSF-VDRL tests, Since pleocytosis in HIVinfected patients can be caused by different infectious agents and by HIV itself, the single finding of pleocytosis is not useful in HIV-infected patients compared to non-HIV-infected patients. HIV-infected patients with serologically evident syphilis and pleocytosis must be considered to have neurosyphilis and thus must be treated for neurosyphilis (5, 15, 21). CSF-VDRL seroreversion and persistent but lower pleocytosis in the three neurocyphilis patients examined were observed after i.v. penicillin therapy, findings which indicate the unspecificity of pleocytosis in these

The low sensitivity of the CSF-VDR test is only partially resolved by other diagnostic tests such as the polymerase chain reaction. TPHA index and rabbit infectivity tests (8, 20), although any one of these is today considered a definitive test for neurosyphilis. Due to the low sensitivity of the VDRL test for the diagnosis of neurosyphilis (1, 5), we could not rule out neurosyphilis in our patients with serologically evident syphilis and negative CSF-VDRL tests, nor could we exclude it in the patients who refused the CSF examination. In light of these problems, we feel that standard neurosyphilis therapy may be an appropriate approach for all HIV-infected patients, regardless of the stage of syphilis.

Acknowledgements

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that direct missescopy should be done on all sputtum samples, current experience definitely warmins the use of PCR as a highly sensitive and specific tool for the rapid diagnosis of tuberculosis.

Hikan Midroor and Ulf Sjilbring

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False-Positive Rapid Plasma Reagts Tests and Anti-Cardiolipia Antibodies

To the Editor — Recent articles [1, 2] have discussed false-positive syphilis test results in the presence of human immunodeficiency (HIV) infection. We suggest that such investigations must consider the influence of IgG anti-cardiolipie authorities on bullegic false-positive results. We have analyzed some of the data shown by Russusk et al. [2] in soble 1. By use of the Newman-Keula multiple comparisons analysis of variance with the Kwikatsi 3.3 computer program, we found that the IgG anti-cardiologin autibody levels of the true negatives were significantly (P < .001) lower than for the false positives and true positives. HIV-1 and neurosyphilis are disorders associated with anti-phospholipide in sem and corchrospinal fluid, respectively [3]. Thus, higher levels of IgG anti-cardiolipin artibodies in an HIV-infected subject may be responsible for a false-positive nontropensural test result.

Table 3. Comparison of anti-cardiologia antibody levels and FTA-ABS and RPR results (from [2]).

Group, FTA -ABS esselv! RPK condits (e)	kpli anti-cardicippe entitledy level, phopholipid unitr (e)
Biologic false-positions (9)	30 ± 2 (%
Time pensives (98)	32 ± T (27)
Treated and resolved (150)	25 ± 4 (48)
True negatives (820)	25 ± 8 (362)

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Note

Response to Standard Syphilis Treatment in Patients Infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus

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Abstract In a study designed to evaluate the efficacy of penicillin in HIV-infected patients with syphilis and to determine the clinical and laboratory responses after treatment, 13 patients with HIV infection and syphilis were assessed at enrollment and at the last follow-up examination (median time of 21 months). The Venereal Diseases Research Laboratory (VDRL) test, the Treponema pallidum hemaglutination test, and leukocyte counts in cerebrospinal fluid were evaluated both at enrollment and at the last follow-up visit, and the polymerase chain reaction for Treponema pallidum DNA and the rabbit infectivity test were performed on cerebrospinal fluid samples at the last follow-up visit. Primary syphilis was confirmed in four patients, latent syphilis in five, and neurosyphilis in four. After penicillin treatment, all patients were asymptomatic. The serum rapid plasma reagin test became negative in five patients, and titers declined in eight. The VDRL test, Treponema pallidum DNA, and the rabbit infectivity test were negative in all 13 patients. Except for one patient whose serological titer was slow to decline, all patients had good clinical and serological responses to penicillin. In certain settings, factors other than penicillin treatment failure should be considered in HIVinfected patients with suspected relapse of syphilis.

Introduction

In recent years penicillin treatment failures have been reported in HIV-infected patients with syphilis [1-6]. Severe immunosuppression and unproven reinfection in HIV-infected patients were considered as possible causes of syphilis relapse [2-8]. Penicillin treatment for syphilis in patients with and without HIV infection has been evaluated in a recent randomized, double-blind study [9]. A weak serological response was found in HIV-infected patients, but clinical failure was uncommon in both groups of patients [9].

The assessment of treatment of neurosyphilis in HIV-infected patients is controversial. Current tests to assess the treatment of neurosyphilis were reported to be suboptimal [1, 2]. The Venereal Diseases Research Laboratory (VDRL) test in cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) has a low sensitivity, but it remains the standard test for diagnosis of neurosyphilis. High immunoglobulin production rates and pleocytosis, both frequent findings in HIV-infected patients, limit the evaluation of syphilis treatment. More recently, the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) for Treponema pullidum DNA was reported to be a promising test for the diagnosis of neurosyphilis [1].

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the efficacy of penicillin treatment in HIV-infected patients with syphilis and to evaluate the clinical and laboratory responses after the end of therapy.

Patients and Methods

In all patients included in the study. HIV infection was confirmed by enzyme immunosssay and Western blot testing. Syphilis was diagnosed in all patients after or at the same time HIV infection was diagnosed.

Clinical examination and serological tests for syphilis (rapid plasma reagin [RPR] test and Treponema pallidum homogglutina-

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tion [TPHA]) were performed at enrollment and during the follow-up period. Clinical and laboratory evaluations were performed in all patients every 3 months for the first year and then every 6 months. CSF studies, including the Venercal Diseases Research (VDRL) test and leukocyte counts, were done at enrollment and at the last evaluation. PCR for Tryponemu pallidam DNA and the rabbit infectivity test (RIT) were performed in CSF samples at the last evaluation. HIV infection and syphilis were scored according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's classification system [10, 11]. At enrollment, patients were treated with penicillin according to the stage of disease.

The PCR to detect Trepomena pullidam DNA in CSF samples was performed in all patients. CSF samples were stored at -70 °C within 60 min after lumbar peacetures. A 658 bp fragment of the gene encoding the 47 kDa Treponena pullidam membrane lipoprotein immunogen was amplified [12]. PCR cycles were performed in a thermocycler (Gene ATAO Controller, Pharmacia, USA). Plasmid pH 47.2 [12] was kindly provided by M. Norgard, Microbiology Department, University of Texas South-Norgard, Microbiology Department, University of Texas South-western Medical Center, Dallas, USA, and hypohilized Treponena pullidam obtained from BioMérieux, France, was used as positive control. The PCR product was analyzed by electrophoresis and dot blot DNA-DNA hybridization with an internal 496 bp peobe [13], using primers 47.3 and 47.4 [13] labeled with DIG-11-dUTP by random priming (DIG DNA Labeling Kit; Bochringer Mannheim, USA). Hybrid identification was carried out by enzyme immunoassay with the chemiluminescence substrate CSPD (DIG Luminescent Detection Kit; Bochringer Mannheim, Germany).

Sensitivity of the assay was determined by using serially diluted, purified Treponema pullidium chromosomal DNA [13]. Based on the average Treponema pullidium chromosome size [13], approximately 0.3 pg or the DNA equivalent of ten treponemes was detected following amplification. Positive PCR results were obtained from a suspension of whole Treponema pullidium calculated to contain ten microorganisms.

The RIT was performed on CSF samples following published methodology [14, 15]. A serological result negative for syphilis was confirmed in all adult male New Zealand white rabbets, CSF samples were thrawed within 60-90 min and inoculated a few minutes later. A 1 ml CSF sample was injected intratesticularly in each rabbit. The rabbits were housed in a single cage at 20°C and fed antibiotic-free food. Each rabbit was examined 2 weeks after inoculation and then weekly for orchits. Three months after inoculation, the RPR test TPHA and testicular biopsy were performed in all rabbits. Testicular biopsies were homogenized

and examined by the direct immunofluorescence test for Treponenta pallidam with the conjugated antibody to Treponenta pallidam-FICT (supplied by Biogenesis UK) [16].

Results and Discussion

Thirteen patients were enrolled in the study (8 males and 5 females; average age 32 years). Risk factors for HIV infection were homosexuality in four patients, drug abuse in seven and multiple sexual partners in two. Primary syphilis was present in four patients, latent syphilis in five and neurosyphilis in four. The VDRL test in CSF was positive in three patients. At presentation these three patients had no other neurological symptoms other than headache. In patient no. 13, the diagnosis of neurosyphilis was based on an unexplained persistent headache, high RPR titers and pleocytosis (Table 1). In this patient a comprehensive series of tests for opportunistic diseases was negative. The four patients with neurosyphilis were treated with 24×106 U of i.v. penicillin for 14 days. Of the patients with primary and latent syphilis (Table 1), eight were treated with benzathine penicillin 2.4×106 U three times weekly and one with procaine penicillin 2.4×10° U i.m. daily for 14 days. The main laboratory findings in the 13 patients at enrollment are shown in Table 2. At follow-up, all patients were asymptomatic. The last follow-up evaluation was performed a median of 21 months after the end of treatment. Main laboratory results are shown in Table 2.

In our study penicillin was an effective treatment for syphilis in HIV-infected patients without severe immunosuppression. After treatment, all our patients were asymptomatic, and the RPR test became negative or declined in titers. During follow-up, patient no. 4 showed a slow decline in the serum RPR titer, but CSF tests were negative. Rolf et al. [9] reported no clinical relapse after penicillin treatment in a large, randomized

Table 1 Stages and laboratory results at enrollment

Patient no.	Syphilis stage	Serum RPR titer	CSF leukocyte count (cells/mm ³)	CSF VDRL titer	HIV classification*	CD4+ count (cells/mm ³)
1	primary	1/32	ND	ND	AI	650
Z	primary	1/16	3	0	At	837
3	primary	1.08	ND	ND	A2	315
4	primary	1/16	ND	ND	A3	123
5	latent	1/16	3	0	Al	699
6	latent	1/32	1	0	AI	480
7.	latent	1/16	3	D	C3	140
8	latent	1/32	2	.0	AT	615
9.	latent	1732	2	0	A1	500
II:	neurosyphilis	1/32	14	1.4	Al	1081
1	neurosyphilis	1/32	24	1/8	A1	1100
2	neurosyphilis	1/8	55	1./8	A2	481
3	neurosyphilis	1/64	16	0	B2	396

^{*} Revised CDC classification system and expanded AIDS surveillance definition for adolescents and adults [10] RPR, rapid plasmid reagin; CSF, cerebrospinal fluid; VDRL, Venereal Diseases Research Laboratory; ND, not done